



President's Column

A Wake-Up Call

■ Dylan Williams

You may have been following, and even voted on, the proposed 2016 IEEE constitutional amendment, which recently failed. This was a real wake-up call for many Members of the IEEE. The amendment appears to have been driven primarily by the IEEE Board of Directors and staff, who presented it as an attempt to increase IEEE Member input. However, many argued that its actual impact would be to weaken the most effective voice that IEEE Members have, the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB).

The role of TAB is to encourage and support IEEE Societies, councils, and committees "to develop and deliver to their global customers appropriate and timely intellectual property products, in either printed or electronic form, or through meetings on current or emerging technologies." That is to say, TAB guides the technical activities of the IEEE. Not only do the technical activities overseen by TAB bring in the bulk of IEEE revenue, but TAB is a truly representative body: each Society or



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council president also becomes a voting member of TAB during his or her term. While there were strong proponents both for and against the amendment, the arguments against took the day, and the measure failed, despite the strong support it received from the IEEE Board of Directors.

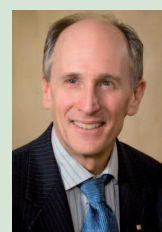
Many of the arguments offered against this amendment made sense, in my opinion. IEEE Societies and councils in general, and the IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S) in particular, are "citizen"-run organizations, in which member participation is highly valued and encouraged. This is true of our conferences, our publications, and our Administrative

Committee (AdCom). For example, every member of our AdCom, including me, was elected from the Society membership and is directly involved in microwave engineering.

As a general rule, IEEE Societies embrace membership participation at all levels of the organization and from all over the world. We cannot think of a better way to boost Member participation in IEEE governance than to support participation of

the Societies and councils through their participation in TAB. Yet the failed amendment proposed a smaller role for TAB while strengthening the role of the IEEE Board of Directors.

I see an interesting parallel between what transpired in our last IEEE election and what is going on in the modestly sized university town of



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Boulder, Colorado, where I live. The citizens in my town pay the bills, and they are passionate about a number of issues, including environmental protection, social justice, and historic preservation. As the city government has grown, so has the number of city-sponsored "open houses," surveys, public discussion groups, and citizen boards. All of these were designed to allow for citizen input on these and other issues.

Still, many of the more engaged citizens in town feel that city staff comes to these meetings with preconceived agendas and that the ideas and concerns most important to the citizenry are not heard or acted upon. How can it be that the concerted efforts on the part of the city to provide additional outreach to its citizens have only increased criticism by the citizenry itself?

I believe that as the city staff increased, they began to form an "insider" culture for which carrying out specific project ideas becomes more important than understanding citizens' (i.e., taxpayers') perspectives and pursuing the ideas they are passionate about. This seems quite natural to me. Staff members see each other day in and day out; they work together on a full-time basis to pursue significant projects they hope to point to later as accomplishments for which the city can be proud.

Citizens, on the other hand, are juggling full-time jobs, along with their families with volunteer activities, and can rarely afford to spend more than a few hours a week, if that, meeting with city staff to share their ideas and goals and plan significant projects together. This is bound to be frustrating for the staff, who may feel that it takes too much time to socialize and explain their proposals and get a less-than-well-organized citizenry onboard with their ideas.

I find the situation developing in Boulder to be regrettable and hope the recently proposed constitutional amendment is not an indication that a similar situation is developing within the IEEE. TAB has been criticized as being slow and unwieldy because it is large and composed of so many volunteer representatives drawn from so many disparate Societies. Certainly, sidelining TAB would simplify the decision-making process within the IEEE and make it easier for the IEEE Board of Directors and staff to pursue projects

unencumbered by this group. But the fact is that TAB does bring together an extraordinary array of the "citizens" of the IEEE and their representatives, and, in an ideal world, everyone at the IEEE would treat this as an incredible opportunity to work with Members, find out what they think, and develop ideas and projects they are passionate about.

Whether or not the failed amendment is an indication of a growing divide in the IEEE, there are proactive steps all of us can take to improve the MTT-S, the IEEE, and the relationship between the two. I am happy to report that some concrete initiatives were approved at the November 2016 TAB meeting to improve communication among IEEE bodies. For our part, we can all try to become more involved in the Society, we can seek out ways to encourage and make it easier for others to get involved, and we can look for opportunities to engage in meaningful dialog with both our colleagues and the IEEE Board of Directors and staff.

All of these build openness and inclusiveness within our Society and the IEEE. I plan to do what I can to support increased member involvement in both our Society and the IEEE during my term.

Would you like to get more involved in the MTT-S? If so, send me an e-mail at dylan@ieee.org with a short description of your interests, and I will get back to you about possibilities!



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